

**Amendments to the Claims:**

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

**Listing of Claims:**

1.-8. (canceled)

9. (new) An operator control element for motor vehicles, comprising:

a fixed base body;

a handle rotatably mounted on said base body for rotating about an axis, said base body having a plurality of windows arranged in circumferential succession about said axis;

an illumination device for illuminating at least one of said plural windows, said illumination device including a plurality of light sources arranged on said base body in circumferential succession about said axis;

a photosensitive element connected to an electronic circuit; and

a lightguide element connected to said handle and having a light input face and a light output face, said light input face being moved past said light sources when said handle is rotated, and said light output face being assigned to face said photosensitive element for guiding light from one of said light sources aligned with said light input face to said photosensitive element, said electronic circuit being arranged and dimensioned for successively switching the light sources and determining a rotary position of the handle based on the output

signal generated by said photosensitive element in response to the successive switching of said light sources.

10. (new) The operator control element of claim 9, wherein said one of said light sources aligned with said input face irradiates both into the input face and into one of said plural display windows.

11. (new) The operator control element of claim 9, further comprising a printed circuit board arranged in said base body and extending perpendicularly to said axis, said photosensitive element being arranged on said printed circuit board.

12. (new) The operator control element of claim 9, wherein said photosensitive element is arranged on said axis.

13. (new) The operator control element of claim 9, further comprising a plurality of photosensitive elements.

14. (new) The operator control element of claim 9, wherein said operator control element is a rotary switch.

15. (new) The operator control element of claim 9, wherein said operator control element is a component of an operator control unit for an air-conditioning system and supplies a setting value for a control unit of the air conditioning system.

16. (new) A method for determining a rotary position of a rotatable operator control element for a motor vehicle component, the rotatable operator control element having a plurality of light sources arranged in circumferential succession about an axis of the operator control element, wherein light irradiating from one of the plural light sources is fed to a photosensitive element as a function of the position of the operator control element, said method comprising the steps of:

successively switching the light sources on and off;

evaluating a signal output from the photosensitive element during the step of successively switching to generate a signal sequence;

comparing the generated signal sequence to stored signal sequences assigned to respective position values;

determining an associated one of the stored signal sequences that corresponds to the generated signal sequence; and

processing the associated one of the stored signal sequences as a setting value of the motor vehicle component.